

Domestic Violence: A Health Risk for State Employees

Family and domestic violence impacts people of all backgrounds and income levels. State employees are not exempt from the long-term effects of family violence. Many family members, children, teens and adults accept forms of violence as normal without recognizing its serious danger. The first step in getting help is to recognize what domestic violence is and acknowledge that family violence is never justified.

Family violence includes all types of abuse. Mind games and constant criticism are examples of emotional abuse. Other common forms of abuse include threats and intimidation, economic and financial control, sexual assault, property destruction and physical assaults such as hitting, punching, beating, choking, hair pulling, kicking, burning and using weapons.

Domestic violence is a family problem and is often inter-generational. Battering is often a learned behavior and without intervention the cycle of violence and emotional scaring continues for generations.

Domestic violence follows a cycle or pattern. The first stage is evidenced by increasing tension as the abuser's frustrations and rage toward the victim builds. Common at this stage are verbal, emotional or economic abuse or threats. Stage two is where the abuser turns violent and participates in acts of violence. Stage three is the aftermath of the abuse and the batterer may become loving and kind, he feels shame and promises to stop the violence. This relief from the tension and abuse is often short lived and, sadly, is also the beginning of stage one, and without intervention the cycle of abuse continues.

Does your spouse/partner . . .

- Hit, shove, or shake you?
- Use name calling, accuse you of having affairs?
- Threaten you, your children or other loved ones? Threaten to take your children away?
- Control where you go, who you see, or whether you work?
- Tell you that you deserve to be hit?

If you have experienced any of the above, call for professional assistance. A starting point is a call to the confidential and no cost **State of Michigan Employee Service Program**. Available to classified state employees and their family members, ESP counselors can assist by providing education, consultation and facilitate links to appropriate services.

The Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Assault is a valuable resource to victims/survivors across the state. To learn more about local resources, visit www.mcadsv.org. The National Domestic Violence Hotline – **800-799-7233** – is a 24-hour crisis intervention and referral service. Crisis intervention, counseling and information on local shelters and resources can be accessed on a 24/7 basis. Their website, www.ndvh.org is full of information for men, women and teens.

If you have experienced family violence it is likely it will happen again and grow in intensity. Develop a plan for your safety before a crisis occurs:

- Instruct children how and when to call the police
- Make family members and trusted friends aware of your situation
- Plan for a safe place such as a domestic violence shelter or the home of someone the abuser doesn't know
- Have an extra set of car keys hidden and readily available
- If violence occurs, try to get out and if it's safe to do so, call the police
- If trapped in a house, avoid kitchens, bathrooms and garages that pose added danger

As stated earlier, there is evidence that the cycle of violence continues from one generation to the next. Abused children and those who witness family violence are more likely to abuse. As children they often treat animals cruelly, constantly fight with classmates or siblings and threaten others. STOP the cycle of violence; help is just a phone call away.